

Health of Home and School

LEAFLET NO. 6.

ISSUED BY THE STATE BOARD OF HEALTH OF MAINE.

What everybody should know about tuberculosis.

Leaflet No. 2 told about the terrible cost and waste and suffering caused by tuberculosis. This will teach briefly how to avoid and how to prevent tuberculosis.

Tuberculosis is an infectious disease.

It is not rapidly infectious, as are many of the communicable diseases; but there are about 5000 persons in our state who at any given time have tuberculosis, recognized or unrecognized. The infection from them, under circumstances which are favorable to it, may remain virulent months or years; and so many of us are exposed to infection under varying circumstances—for these reasons, 1000 or more of us in Maine every year die the death of consumptives.

Whence comes the infection ?

Most cases of human tuberculosis come from the infection from other human beings. The infection in a much smaller number, in children particularly, comes from the milk of tuberculous cows.

How the infection is spread.

Fix distinctly in mind that there are three principal ways in which human infection goes from the sick to other persons:

1. What is spit out by the person who has tuberculosis gets upon the floor, furniture, bedding, clothing, handkerchiefs, and, after it becomes dry, is pulverized, is whisked into the air by brooms or dusters or by human movements, and is then breathed down by other persons.

2. When the patient coughs, he sprays minute droplets into the air and the infection in these while still floating in the air is breathed down by other persons near him.

3. Spoons, forks, cups, pipes, pencils, or any other things which have been to the lips of a person with tuberculosis, are extremely dangerous to other persons and unless they have been scalded or otherwise sterilized most easily and quickly give the disease to others.

Predisposing causes.

The infection (bacillus) is the real cause, the indispensable cause. When a person receives infection into his system, a battle begins between the invading bacillus on the one hand and the defensive forces of the body on the other. If the dose is massive enough, it may bring down the strongest, the most resistant person, but almost always the issue of the battle, whether in recovery or death, will depend upon the outside influences which are brought to bear. Pure air, good nourishing food, and not too much exercise, help toward recovery.

But, on the other hand, impure, heated and dusty air, insufficient or unsuitable food, alcoholic drinks, overwork, and excesses of any kind, are some of the influences which help the infection to overcome its victim. These or anything which tends to "run down" the system may act as predisposing causes.

Tuberculosis is a preventable disease.

Everywhere—in nation, state, or city—where the people have engaged in earnest work against tuberculosis, the death-rate from that disease has been reduced. In Maine, the tuberculosis death-rate is now one-third less than it was in 1892. Taking into account the estimated increase in the population of our state in the interval, there are now 500 fewer deaths from tuberculosis than there would have been if the death-rate had not been diminished. This fact should encourage us to a more vigorous fight against this greatest enemy of our welfare.

How may we further lower the death-rate?

The following may be put down as the most important things to do:

1. The further extension of the educative work is the first thing. The teaching that tuberculosis is an infectious disease, but that it may and should be controlled and prevented should be presented to every family in the land until this is grasped as a truth to be acted upon.

2. Every person who has tuberculosis should at all times strictly carry out the rules laid down by the state board of health to guard against giving the infection to others. He should do it voluntarily or be compelled to do it. The careless cougher or the careless spitter endangers himself and everybody else near him. On the other hand, the intelligently careful one need not be shunned, but should receive the help and sympathy which he deserves.

3. It should be felt to be everybody's interest to insist upon compliance with the provisions of the new and good law of the State of Maine against tuberculosis.

4. Sleeping with open windows at all seasons of the year should become a general custom.

Some special rules.

For the prevention of tuberculosis the following rules should be remembered and observed:

1. The person who coughs should, when practicable, and when near other persons, hold before his mouth a piece of paper or cloth to be burned afterwards.

2. For the reception of the sputum, paper cups, which with their contents, may be burned, are the best. Local boards may furnish them to needy persons at the expense of the town.

3. Spitting on floors of living-rooms, factories, public buildings and cars is too dangerous to be allowed. The sputum of many persons unsuspected of having tuberculosis is dangerous. There should be a strict enforcement of the penalty of the law for such practices.

4. Public drinking cups in schools, railway trains and elsewhere, are dangerous and should be avoided.

5. The eating and drinking utensils used by persons with tuberculosis or with cough should not be used by other persons until they have been washed by themselves and scalded with boiling water.

6. A tuberculous patient should keep his hands scrupulously clean. Infected fingers carry infection.

7. Sputum should not be exposed to flies. The first flight therefrom may be to food products or food preparations.

8. Children associating with tuberculous persons are especially endangered, particularly infants in arms or upon the floor. Their fingers wipe up infection from various sources and carry it to their mouths.

9. Tuberculosis is a house disease. Indoors, the infection may remain virulent a long time. Outdoors, the direct sunshine is pretty rapidly destructive of the bacillus. Thorough disinfection of infected rooms and things as the law provides should be the invariable rule.

Tuberculosis is a curable disease.

In the earliest stage, nearly all cases of tuberculosis might be cured. But there are four great mistakes which are every year drawing hundreds of infected persons into the maelstrom from which there is no rescue: (a) Waiting for the symptoms of "consumption" (the advanced stage) before suspecting tuberculosis is present. (b) Failure to seek competent medical advice and treatment early. (c) Failure of the physician frankly to say that tuberculosis is present or suspected. The person who knows early and accepts the truth is he who has the best chance for speedy recovery. (d) Trusting to patent medicines. And these four resolve themselves into one fatal error, loss of time.

The symptoms which should lead to a suspicion of tuberculosis, particularly if there has been exposure to tuberculous infection, are: a "run down" feeling; loss of weight; cough lasting a month or more, even if slight, or noticeable only mornings; increase of temperature afternoons; spitting of blood or streaks of blood in sputum, night sweats.

Every family in which there is a case of tuberculosis, or in which it is suspected, should have Circular No. 54.